

CHAPTER 2

CURIOSITY ABOUT ACTION

In the nature of a preface, Chapter 1 presents the seeker's doubts and confusions. The participants in the war include all of the Kaurav and Pandav, but Arjun alone is subject to misgivings. However, Arjun is the very embodiment of devotion as a wayfarer on the path of spiritual quest. It is his love for God that inspires him to get ready for the war between matter and spirit. The initial stage is thus of love, adoration. My revered teacher used to say, "Believe that adoration of the Supreme Spirit has commenced when, even while one is leading the life of a householder,¹ there are signs of weariness and tears, and sentiment so powerful that it chokes the throat." Manifold strands are entwined in love: of dharm, precept, restraint, pious association, and sentiment.

In the first stage of spiritual seeking, attachment to the family looms as an obstacle. At the outset everyone wishes to achieve the ultimate reality, but the worshipper is overtaken by despair when he realizes that after going a certain length of the way he will have to sever all his ties of attachment to the family. So he learns to be contented with whatever customs he had followed earlier. He even cites prevailing customs to justify his infatuation, just as Arjun does when he insists that family rites are Sanatan Dharm. The war will cause the extinction of the Sanatan Dharm itself and, along with that, destruction of families and loss of civilized ways. Far from being an independent view of Arjun, his ideas only

1. Garhastya : the second of the four stages in the traditional Hindu life, the other three being brahmcharya, vanprasth, and sanyas.^{back}

reflect some inherited creeds he had acquired earlier before approaching an accomplished teacher such as Krishn.

Mired in these traditions, men devise numerous religions, sects, groups small and large, and castes beyond reckoning. Some press the nose while others pierce their ears, while yet others lose their dharm because they are touched by someone, or because their food and drink are defiled. Is it just to blame the so called “untouchables” or non-Hindus for this state of affairs? By no means. The blame should rather be apportioned among those who propagate delusions in the name of dharm. As for us who listen to them, we are blind victims of what are but misguided customs, and so we, too, have to bear part of the blame.

In Mahatma Buddh’s time there was a sect called Kesh-Kambal,² the members of which regarded the practice of growing hair, so that it could be used like a blanket, as a standard of perfection. There have been some who thought it pious to live like cows, while others have lived and conducted themselves in the manner of dogs. But all these were only stupid customs that have nothing to do with awareness of God. There were schisms and foolish customs in the past, and they are with us even today. There were also divisions and stupid customs in Krishn’s time, and Arjun is a victim of some of them. This is seen from his four arguments, namely that war destroys the eternal Sanatan Dharm and that it produces varnsankar, an unholy intermingling of disparate classes and ways of life. Obsequial offerings of diseased ancestors will cease and that we shall by being engaged in destroying our race, invite great curses on us. Thereupon, Yogeshwar Krishn speaks to him.

1. **“Sanjay said, ‘To him (Arjun), whose eyes were brimming with tears of grief because he was overcome by pity, Madhusudan spoke thus.’”**

संजय उवाच: तं तथा कृपयाविष्टमश्रुपूर्णाकुलेक्षणम् ।

विषीदन्तमिदं वाक्यमुवाच मधुसूदनः ॥१॥

2. Literally translated, Kesh-Kambal is “blanket of hair”. ^{back}

To Arjun, his eyes filled with tears of sorrow and profound agitation, Madhusudan, the destroyer of arrogance, speaks:

2. **“The Lord said, ‘From what cause, O Arjun, does this unmanly (un-Arjun-like), heaven-barring, and shameful despair come over you at this perilous spot?’”**

Krishn uses the term “visham” for the place where Arjun and he are at the time. Besides meaning “difficult” or “dangerous,” the word also means “unique” or “unequalled.” So Krishn really wishes to know that which has caused spiritual ignorance (agyan)³ in Arjun in this unusual, unparalleled setting. The setting is one, the like of which, can be found nowhere else in the entire world, because it is the sphere of spiritual striving towards an unworldly, celestial goal. In such a universal and undisputed setting, how has spiritual ignorance come over Arjun? Why does Krishn call Arjun’s views spiritual ignorance? Has Arjun not said categorically that it is his heartfelt wish to defend Sanatan Dharm ? Is it spiritual ignorance to be resolved, body and soul, to protect what Arjun believes to be the immutable, eternal dharm? According to Krishn it is so, for it has not been the practice of those who truly deserve to be called men. Neither does it provide access to heaven. It is also not conducive to glory. The one who keeps firmly to the path of righteousness is an Arya. In Hindu scriptures, instead of referring to any race or stock, “Arya” denotes an exceptionally cultivated man who adheres scrupulously to dharm. If dying for one’s family were not an instance of ignorance, Krishn adds, sages would have practised it. Had family traditions been the ultimate reality, they would have been used as a ladder for climbing up to heaven and salvation. When Meera sang her songs of divine adoration, people declared her insane and her mother-in-law condemned her as a

श्रीभगवानुवाचः कुतस्त्वा कश्मलमिदं विषमे समुपस्थितम् ।
अनार्यजुष्टमस्वर्ग्यमकीर्तिकरमर्जुन ॥२॥

3. Agyan: the ignorance which makes a man consider himself as distinct and separate from the Supreme Spirit and the material world as truly existing. ^{back}

destroyer of the family. But no one today remembers the mother-in-law for shedding copious tears of concern about the well-being of her family and safety of its honour, while the whole world cherishes the memory of Meera. After all, how long can we remember the man who is concerned only about his family? Is it not evident then that customs which bring neither glory nor sublime happiness, and which have at no time been accepted by an Arya (a man of dharma), must be a kind of ignorance? Krishn says to Arjun:

3. “Don’t give in, O Parth, to unmanliness for it does not become you. So, O Parantap, stand up and drive away this disgraceful weakness of your heart.”

Krishn exhorts Arjun not to yield to impotence (klaibyam). Is Arjun impotent-lacking in virility? Are we virile men? An impotent man is one who is devoid of manliness. All of us, according to our wisdom, do what we believe to be manly. A peasant who sweats day and night in his fields, tries to prove his manliness by his labour. Some demonstrate their manliness in commerce and yet others try to prove that they are real men by abusing their powers. Ironically, however, even after this lifelong display of manliness, we depart but empty-handed at the end. Is it not obvious then that all this is not true manliness? True manliness is Self-knowledge: awareness of the Soul and its divine origin. To cite yet another example from the Brihadaranyak Upanishad, Gargi tells Yagnvalkyia that a man, though endowed with sexual prowess, is yet unmanly if he has no awareness of the embodied Soul. This Self is the real man (Purush), radiant and unmanifest. The endeavour to know this Self is true manliness (paurush). It is because of this that Krishn asks Arjun not to surrender to impotence. It is unworthy of him. He is a scorcher, a formidable vanquisher, of foes. So he ought to reject his grovelling feebleness and stand up for battle. He should

क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते ।

क्षुद्रं हृदयदीर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परंतप ॥३॥

give up his social attachments, for they are mere frailties. At this Arjun raises his third question:

4. **“Arjun said, ‘How, O Madhusudan, slayer of enemies, shall I shoot arrows in the battle against men like Bheeshm and Dron who deserve only honour?’”**

Arjun addresses Krishn as Madhusudan, destroyer of the demon of ego, and wants to know from him how he can fight with his grandsire Bheeshm and teacher Dron. Both are deserving of only reverence. Dual conduct, as we have seen, is Dronacharya: the conduct that arises from the feeling that God is separate from us and we are separate from him. But the consciousness of this duality is also the initial urge for spiritual accomplishment. This is Dronacharya’s excellence as a teacher. And then there is Bheeshm, the very image of delusion. So long as we stray from the right path and are under the sway of delusion, children, family, and kinsmen all appear as our own. The feeling that they belong to me-are mine, is the medium through which delusion works. The deluded man regards them as worthy of worship and clings to them, for that one is father, the other one grandfather, and still another the teacher who has taught him. But after spiritual attainment there is neither teacher nor pupil, and the Self who has gained awareness of the essence, of the Supreme Spirit, is left all alone.

When the Self is absorbed in God, neither is the teacher a preceptor nor the disciple a receptacle. This is the state of the most exalted excellence. After assimilating the teacher’s excellence the disciple shares it, and the distinction between the teacher and the pupil is obliterated. Krishn says, “Arjun, you shall dwell in me.” Arjun will become identical with Krishn, and the same is true of every sage who has known attainment. In such a state the teacher’s existence merges into, and his magnificence flows spontaneously like a crystal stream through, the disciple’s heart.

अर्जुन उवाच

कथं भीष्ममहं संख्ये द्रोणं च मधुसूदन ।

इषुभिः प्रति योत्स्यामि पूजार्हावस्मिन् ॥४॥

But Arjun is yet far from that state and at present he exploits even the teacher's office as a shield to ward off participation in the war.

5. **“Even to live in this world as a mendicant begging for alms is better than killing teachers, for if I kill them all my joys and riches and desires in this world will be drenched in (their) blood.”**

Arjun prefers the life of a beggar who lives on alms to killing his teachers. Rather than meaning “to beg for livelihood” (for the sustenance of the body), “begging” here denotes soliciting great men-through rendering even a half-hearted service to them-for the favour of propitious fortune. Food is the only God, after partaking of which the Soul's hunger is assuaged for ever.⁴ That he should, even though in small measures, continue to taste the manna of God's excellence by serving and soliciting a sage, without having to part with his family, is the craving behind Arjun's tearful appeal. Don't most of us do the same? It is our aspiration that we should gradually, at some point, achieve spiritual liberation without having to destroy the ties of familial love and attachment. But there is no such way for the seeker who has achieved a higher level of accomplishment than this and is strong enough to face the war raging on the battlefield of his heart. Soliciting and imploring like an almsman rather than doing something on one's own is like begging for food like a mendicant.

In the “Dhamnadaya Sutt” of Majjhim Nikaya, Mahatma Buddha has also declared the food obtained by begging inferior because it is like flesh received as alms.

गुरुनहत्वा हि महानुभावान् श्रेयो भोक्तुं भैक्ष्यमपीह लोके ।
हत्वार्थकामांस्तु गुरुनिहैव भुञ्जीय भोगान् रुधिरप्रदिग्धान् ॥५॥

4. The idea is found at several places in the Upanishad. The Upanishad Taittiriya says, “Those who worship food as God (Brahm) gain all material objects. From food are risen all beings, which born, live and grow by food. All beings subsist on food, and, when they die, food partakes of them.”^{back}

How will he profit, Arjun asks, by killing his teachers? What else can the world reward him with for this crime but the unnatural enjoyment of bloodstained pleasures of sensual gratification and material prosperity? It appears from this that he perhaps believes that loving adoration of God will augment his worldly happiness. So his only achievement even after the most strenuous struggle, he believes, can be nothing more than enjoyment of riches which sustain the body and sensual pleasures. He goes on to make yet another reasoning:

6. **“I hardly know which is better, their (the Kaurav’s) conquering us or our conquering them - even Dhritrashtra’s sons -who are our enemies, and yet after killing whom we may not wish to live.”**

Even possession of the hoped-for delights is not assured. Arjun is at his wit’s end as to what course of action can bring him glory, for whatever he has said till now has been proved to be only ignorance. He does not also know whether he will rout the Kaurav or they will rout him. Dhritrashtra’s sons, after slaying whom he should not desire to live, are arrayed against him. What shall he live for if his feelings of attachment represented here by his kinsmen, all of them progeny of Dhritrashtra’s ignorance, are destroyed? At the same time, however, it occurs to Arjun that what he has said now may be also false. So he turns to Krishn again:

7. **“With my mind swamped with feeble pity and confusion regarding duty, I entreat you to instruct me as to what is definitely conducive to my glory, for I am your disciple and have taken refuge in you.”**

न चैतद्विन्नः कतरन्नो गरीयो यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।

यानेव हत्व न जिजीविषामस्तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः ॥६॥

कार्पण्यदोषोपहतस्वभावः पृच्छामि त्वां धर्मसंमूढचेताः ।

यच्छ्रेयः स्यान्निश्चित ब्रूहि तन्मे शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् ॥७॥

With his heart enfeebled by pity and his mind clouded with infatuation in regard to dharm, Arjun begs Krishn to tell him the means that will definitely be the most conducive to what is supremely propitious for him. But why should Krishn do this? According to Arjun, it is Krishn's duty to show him the right path because he (Arjun) is a disciple who has found shelter under him.

Furthermore, he needs not only instruction but also support when he stumbles. He is like the man requesting a helper to place the load on his back, help him in securing it there, and also to come along with him, for who will put back the load in place again if it slips down. Such is Arjun's abject submission to Krishn.

At this point Arjun's surrender is complete. Until now he had thought himself an equal of Krishn in merit and, in fact, even superior to him in certain skills. But now he really puts himself at the mercy of his charioteer. An accomplished teacher dwells in his disciple's heart and is always by his side until the goal is reached. If he is not there by his side, the pupil may falter in his quest. Like the guardians of a maiden who protect her till her marriage, an accomplished teacher acts as a charioteer who skilfully manoeuvres his disciple's Soul safely across the perilous valleys of nature. Arjun now makes one more submission:

8. "I do not see that obtaining an undisputed and profitable dominion over the whole earth or, (for that matter) even lordship over the gods, can cure the grief that is wearing out my senses."

Arjun cannot believe that even a secure and lucrative realm extending across the whole earth or even an Indr-like lordship over the gods of heaven can help him get rid of the sorrow that is withering his senses. If his grief is unabated, what shall he do with all these acquisitions? He begs to be excused from fighting in the

न हि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्याद् यच्छोकमुच्छोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम् ।
अवाप्य भूमावसपत्नमृद्धं राज्यं सुराणामपि चाधिपत्यम् ॥८॥

war if these are to be his only rewards in return. He is utterly disheartened and he does not know what to say after this.

9. **“Sanjay said,’ After having thus spoken to Hrishikesh, Arjun, the conqueror of sleep and destroyer of foes, told Govind⁵ (Krishn) that he would not fight, and then he fell silent.”**

So far Arjun’s attitude has been determined by the Puran,⁶ which contain ordinances for ceremonial acts and sacrificial rites as well as the enjoyment of benefits arising from a due performance thereof. In these works, heaven is the ultimate goal: but Krishn later enlightens Arjun that this line of thought is mistaken.

10. **“Hrishikesh then, O Bharat (Dhritrashtra), with a smile as it appeared, spoke thus to him (Arjun) who sat mournfully between the two armies.”**

Krishn, knower of secrets of the innermost heart (Hrishikesh), speaks smilingly to the grieving Arjun:

11. **“The Lord said, Although sorrowing over those who ought not to be grieved for, you yet speak wise words; but the discriminating mourn over neither the living nor those who are dead.”**

संजय उवाचः एवमुक्त्वा हृषीकेशं गुडाकेशः परंतप ।
न योत्स्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह ॥९॥
तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत ।
सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषीदन्तमिदं वचः ॥१०॥
श्रीभगवानुवाचः अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे ।
गतासूनगतासंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः ॥११॥

5. One of the several names of Krishn, meaning “a keeper of cows” or “a herdsman.”^{back}
6. Name of certain ancient sacred compositions, eighteen in number and believed to have been written by Vyas. These works contain the whole body of Hindu mythology,^{back}

Krishn tells Arjun that while he grieves for those who are unworthy of such grief, he also speaks words of wisdom, but men of discernment mourn neither for those whose souls have departed nor for the ones who are living. They do not grieve for the living because they shall also die. That means that Arjun only talks like a wise man; he does not know the reality, since-

12. “It is not that either you or I, or all these kings, did not exist in the past, nor is it that our being will come to an end in the future.”

It is not, Krishn explains, that he, the accomplished teacher, or Arjun-the devoted pupil, or all these kings with the vanity that is characteristic of rulers of men, did not exist at any time in the ages to come. The accomplished teacher is for ever, and so are affectionate disciples as well as rulers who symbolize the perversions of passion and moral blindness. Here, besides throwing light on the permanence of Yog in general, Yogeshwar Krishn has particularly stressed its existence in the future. Explaining why the dead should not be mourned over, he says:

13. “Since the embodied Spirit passes through infancy, youth, and old age in the body, and then transmigrates into another body, men with steadfast minds do not grieve over his passing away.”

As the embodied soul waxes from childhood to youth, then wanes to old age, and assumes one new body after another, wise men are not prey to infatuation. At some time a man is a boy and then he grows into a young man. But does he die by this? Then

न त्वेवाहः जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपाः ।
न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम् ॥१२॥
देहिनोऽस्मिन्यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।
तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति ॥१३॥

he grows old. The Self is ever the same; only the condition of the physical body in which he resides goes on changing. There is no crack in him when he changes over to a new body. This change from one physical body to another will continue until the Soul is united with the Supreme Spirit who alone is beyond all change.

- 14. “There are sensations of heat and cold, and of pain and pleasure, O son of Kunti, as senses meet their objects. Bear them patiently, O Bharat, because they have a beginning and an end, and are transient.”**

The contact of senses and their objects, which generates pleasure and pain, and feelings of cold and warmth, is occasional and momentary. Arjun should, therefore, abandon them. But instead of that, he is shaken by the mere thought of pleasures that are derived from the union of senses and their objects. The family for the sake of whom we yearn for pleasures and the teacher whom we revere both represent the attachment of senses. But the causes of this attachment are momentary, false and perishable. Neither shall our senses always meet with objects they enjoy, nor shall they always be capable of enjoyment. So Arjun is counselled to give up sensual pleasures and learn to withstand the demands of his senses. But why is Arjun counselled thus? Is it a Himalayan war in which he has to endure cold? Or is it a desert war in which he has to suffer heat? As knowledgeable people say, the actual “Kurukshetr” has a moderate climate. During the mere eighteen days that is the total duration of the Mahabharat war, is it possible that seasons will change: that winter and summer will come and go? The truth is that endurance of cold and heat, of happiness and sorrow, of honour and dishonour, depends upon the seeker’s spiritual endeavour. The Geeta is, as we have seen more than once, an externalization of the inner conflict that rages within the

mind. This war is the war between the gross physical body and the Self which is aware of his identity with God. It is a conflict in which ultimately even the forces of divinity grow inert after they have subdued unrighteous impulses and enabled the Self to become one with God. When there remains no impiety, what else is there for pious impulses to fight? The Geeta is thus a picturization of inner conflict that rages within the mind. What advantages, however, will the recommended sacrifice of senses and their pleasures bring? What is gained by this? Krishn speaks of this:

- 15. “So, O the noblest of men (Arjun), one who is possessed of equanimity in pain and pleasure, and firm, and untormented by these (feelings produced by the meeting of senses with their objects), deserves (to taste) the nectar of immortality.”**

The steadfast man, who regards sorrow and happiness with equipoise and is not troubled by his senses and their association with objects, is worthy of the state of immortality that realization of the Supreme Spirit brings. Here Krishn refers to an attainment, namely amrit, literally the drink of immortality. Arjun had thought that in return for the war he would be rewarded with either a heavenly abode or the authority to rule over the earth. But now Krishn tells him that his prize will be amrit rather than the pleasures of heaven or earthly power. What is this amrit?

- 16. “The unreal has no being and the real has no non-being; and the truth about both has also been seen by men who know the reality.”**

The unreal has no existence; it has no being and so bringing it to an end is out of the question. On the other hand, there is no

यं हि न व्यथयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।
समुदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥१५॥
नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः ।
उभयोरपि दृष्टोऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥१६॥

absence of the real in all time-past, present or future. Arjun then asks Krishn whether he is saying this as an incarnation of God. Krishn's reply to this is that the distinction between the real and the unreal has also been revealed to sages who have realized the true nature of the human Soul as identical with the Supreme Spirit pervading the universe. That is to say that Krishn of the Geeta is a seer who has gained an insight into reality. What, after all, are true and false, real and unreal?

17. “Know that since the Spirit which pervades the universe is imperishable and immutable, no one can effect his destruction.”

That which spreads through and is present in every atom of the universe is indestructible. No one is capable of destroying the imperishable principle. But what is the name of this deathless amrit? Who is he?

18. “Fight, O Bharat (Arjun), because while the bodies which clothe the Soul are said to come to an end, the embodied Spirit itself is for ever, indestructible, and boundless.”

Arjun is exhorted to get up and fight because all these physical bodies that embody the indwelling, boundless, and eternal Spirit are said to be ephemeral. This Spirit, the Self, is imperishable, and it cannot be destroyed at any time. The Self is real, whereas the physical body is subject to death, and so unreal and nonexistent at all times.

Krishn's injunction to Arjun is, “Fight because the body is mortal.” But it is not evident from the exhortation whether Arjun is required to kill only the Kaurav. Aren't the men on the side of

अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति ॥१७॥
अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः ।
अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युध्यस्व भारत ॥१८॥

Pandav, too, “bodies”? Are the Pandav immortal? If physical bodies are mortal, who is Krishn there to defend? Is Arjun not a body, too? Is Krishn there to defend that body which is unreal, without being, and unceasing? If it is so, may it not be assumed that he too is ignorant and lacking in discrimination, the power that distinguishes between the visible world and the invisible Spirit. Doesn't he himself say later that the man who thinks of and toils only for the physical body (3.13) is ignorant and wanting in discernment? Such a wretched man lives in vain. There is also another problem. Who really is this Arjun?

As it was said in Chapter I, Arjun is an embodiment of affectionate devotion. Like a faithful charioteer, the revered God is always with his devotee. Like a friend, he guides him and shows him the right way. We are not a physical body. The body is a mere garment, a dwelling for the Soul to live in. The one who lives in it is the affectionate Self. The physical body was sometime back called “unceasing.” Elemental wars and slaughter do not destroy the body. When one body is forsaken, the Soul just assumes another body. It is with reference to this that Krishn has said that there is change from one body to another just as a man grows from childhood to youth, and then to old age. If you hack a body to pieces, the Soul just puts on another body like a new apparel.

The real base of the body is constituted by sanskar, the merits-the influences and impressions-earned during a previous existence. And sanskar rests upon the mind. Perfect subjugation of the mind, so that it can be changeless, firm, and constant, and the dissolution of the last sanskar, are all different aspects of the same process. The disintegration of the last crust of this sanskar marks the end of physical existence. To bring about this dissolution we have to undertake aradhana, worship and adoration, of the desired God. Krishn has named it action (karm) or the Way of Selfless Action (Nishkam Karm Yog). In the Geeta, he has from time to time urged Arjun to wage war, but in the entire poem there is not one verse that supports the idea that this war is a physical

war or in any way related to the idea of actual bloodshed. Evidently this war is the war between the opposed impulses of righteousness and unrighteousness, the forces of piety and those of impiety, that is fought within man's Soul-the seat of all thought and feeling.

19. “They are both ignorant, he who believes that the Self slays and he who thinks that he is slain, for he neither slays nor he is slain.”⁷

He who regards the Self as the slayer and he who regards him as the slain are both unaware of his real nature, for he neither kills nor can he be killed. The same point is stressed again:

20. “Neither (ever) born nor dying, neither at any time coming into being nor ceasing to be, the Self is birthless, perpetual, unchanging, and timeless, and he is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.”

The Self, the God within soul, is neither at any time born nor does he at any time die, for what he undergoes in the name of death is a mere change of apparel. He cannot also be anything other than Self, because he is birthless, permanent, eternal, and primeval. Disintegration, death, of the body does not annihilate the self. The Self alone is real, timeless, unchanging, and eternal. Who are you? A follower of the eternal Dharm? What is for ever? The Self. So you are a follower, a disciple, of the Self.

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।

उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥१९॥

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचित् नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।

अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥२०॥

7. R. W. Emerson, the American transcendentalist poet-philosopher, has rendered the idea in his poem entitled “Brahma” (1857) thus :

If the red slayer thinks he slays.
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.^{back}

The Self and Brahm (God) are synonymous, And who are you ? A worshipper of the eternal Dharm. What is immutable? The Self, of course. That is to say that you and I all are adorers of the Self? But if we are not familiar with the spiritual path to the eternal truth, the way of following the dictates of the Self until he is one with the Supreme Spirit, we have nothing that is worthy of being described as changeless and everlasting. We are on trial for the final absolution and in close proximity to God if we pine for him, but we cannot be deemed as having been admitted as long as we are credulous enough to accept blindly one wrong convention or the other masquerading as Sanatan Dharm.

Be it in India or any other country, the Soul in all is identical. So, if anywhere on the earth there is a man who is aware of the true nature of Self and his ultimate goal, and who is eager to take to the way which will eventually lead his Self to the Supreme Spirit, be he a professed Christian, Muslim, Jew, or anything else, he undoubtedly also belongs to the fold of Sanatan Dharm-the changeless and eternal.

21. “How can he, O Parth, who is conscious of the Soul within as imperishable, permanent, birthless, and immutable, kill or move another to kill?”

Arjun is addressed as Parth, for he has made a chariot of the earth-made body and is preparing to take a perfect aim at the Supreme Spirit. The man who knows that the embodied Soul is indestructible, permanent, beyond birth, and unmanifest-how can he make others slay or be a slayer himself? Destruction of what is indestructible is impossible. And, being beyond birth, the Self is also never born. So why grieve for the body? This idea is further elaborated in the following verse:

वेदाविनाशिनं नित्यं य एनमजमव्ययम् ।

कथं स पुरुषः पार्थ कं घातयति हन्ति कम् ॥२१॥

- 22. “Like a man who puts on new garments after discarding his worn out clothes, the embodied Self, also, casts off tattered bodies and transmigrates into other bodies that are new.”**

The Soul rejects bodies that have been ravaged by old age or some other disease and dresses himself in new apparel just as a man throws away old, torn clothes and puts on new clothes. But if new clothing is needed only when the fabric of old clothes is weakened, why do young children die?

These “garments” have yet to grow and evolve. It was said a little earlier that the body rests on sanskar, the impressions from action attained in the course of a previous existence. When the store of sanskar is depleted, the Self discards the body. If the sanskar is of two days’ duration only, the body will be on the brink of death on the second day itself. Beyond sanskar there is not even a single breath of life; sanskar is the body and the Self assumes a new body according to his sanskar. According to the Chandogya Upanishad, “A man is primarily his will. As is his will in this life, so does he become when he departs from it.” It is the firmness of his will in one life that determines what a man will be in the next. Man is thus born in bodies that are shaped by his own will. So death is a mere physical change: the Self does not die. Krishn again emphasizes the same imperishability of the Soul.

- 23. “This Self is neither pierced by weapons, nor burnt by fire, nor made damp by water, nor dried up by wind.”**

Weapons cannot cleave the Self. Fire cannot singe him. He cannot also be drenched by water, nor withered by wind.

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥२२॥

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥२३॥

24. “The Self, which cannot be pierced or burnt or made wet or faded, is uninterrupted, all-pervasive, constant, immovable, and eternal.”

The Self cannot be cut or pierced through; he cannot be burnt; and he cannot be soaked. Even the whole firmament cannot contain him within its expanse. The Self is beyond doubt, ever-fresh, omnipresent, immovable, constant, and everlasting.

Arjun has pronounced family traditions to be eternal. So, according to him, the war will destroy Sanatan Dharm itself. But Krishn finds it an example of ignorance and points out that the Self alone is eternal. If we do not know the means by which we can realize our Self and his goal, we have no inkling of Sanatan Dharm. India has paid a heavy price for this ignorance.

The total number of Muslim invaders who came to this country in the Middle Ages was approximately twelve thousand. Today they have multiplied to more than 280 million. Twelve thousand could reasonably have grown to a few hundred thousand to 10 million at the most. They could not have grown to more than this. But their number now is more than a 280 million. Now, who are the majority of them but Hindus, our own coreligionists and brothers, who were lost to the fold because of our absurd taboos of food and touch? In fact, their conversion is a proof that we have by and large lost touch with Sanatan Dharm. We are so befogged by silly customs that we have lost the capacity to realize that food and touch cannot destroy Sanatan Dharm. The truth is that no object of the material world can touch this universal spiritual principle. What has made us lose millions of our brothers is not dharm but only some stupid conventions. And the same misconceptions must be held responsible for our worsening communal situation, partition of India, and even for the serious threats to our national unity and integrity that we are

अच्छेद्योऽयमदाह्योऽयमक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एव च ।

नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं सनातनः ॥२४॥

facing today. There are innumerable examples of how we have suffered because of our mindless customs that have nothing to do with dharm.

There used to live fifty-to-sixty cultured Kshatriya families in a village in Hamirpur district. But today they are all Muslims. Were they proselytized, we may ask, under threat of swords and guns? Not at all. What really happened was this – One night a couple of mullahs hid themselves near the only well of the village, knowing that the first bather to come to the well in the morning would be the karmkandi⁸ Brahmin of the village. When he came, the mullahs caught hold of him and gagged him. Then before his eyes they drew some water out of the well, drank some of it, and poured the rest back into the well; they also dropped a piece of partly-eaten bread into it. The Brahmin looked on dumbfounded at all this, but he was helpless. Finally, the mullahs left along with the Brahmin, whom they locked up in their house.

The next day when the mullahs requested him with folded hands to eat something, the Brahmin flared up and said, “you are a Yavan⁹ and I am a Brahmin. How on earth can I eat your food?” The mullahs replied, “Revered sir, we sorely need wise men like you.” Thereafter the Brahmin was set free.

He went back to his village and saw his people using the well as before. So as a penance he went on fast. When people asked him for the reason, he told them how some Muslims had climbed upon the low wall around the well, and how they had also poured defiled water and cast a piece of partly-eaten bread into it. Stunned, the people of the village asked, “What shall we do now?” The Brahmin replied, “Nothing, because we have lost our dharm.”

People were usually not educated in those days. No one knows how long since women and the, so called “untouchables” had been deprived of the right to learn. The Vaishya were convinced that

8. An expert of the section of the Ved which is related to ceremonial acts and sacrificial rites. ^{back}

9. Originally meaning an Ionian (Greek), but now used for any alien or non-Hindu. ^{back}

making money was their only dharm. The Kshatriya were absorbed in the laudatory songs of minstrels. No sooner did their master's sword flash than there was lightning and the throne of Delhi began to shake. If honour came from muscle power, the Kshatriya thought, why should they study and learn? What had they, wielders of arms, to do with dharm. Dharm had thus turned into a monopoly of the Brahmin. Not only were they framers of religious laws as well as their interpreters, they had also appointed themselves the final arbiters of right and wrong-of the true and the false. Such was the country's moral and spiritual degradation in the medieval times. As against this, in ancient India, not only the Brahmin but members of all classes and even women had been entitled to study of the Ved. Sages of different schools had then composed the Vedic verses and participated in spiritual discourses and debates. Ancient Indian rulers are known to have severely punished those who propagated pretence and affectation in the name of dharm. They had also paid due respect to the scriptures of religions other than their own.

But in medieval India, ignorant of the spirit of Sanatan Dharm, the Kshatriya of the village of our sad story slunk one after the other into a corner like frightened sheep, shuddering with the unbearable agony of the thought that they had lost their dharm. Some of them even committed suicide. But, of course, all of them could not be expected to kill themselves. Men of staunch faith, they yet looked for an alternative because of their mistaken belief. Even today the Muslims of the Hamirpur village solemnize their weddings like Hindus. Only at the end of the ceremony a mullah is brought in to perform the nikah ceremony. All of them were once faithful Hindus and all of them are now faithful Muslims.

The catastrophe, as we have seen, was brought about by nothing more than the prevailing Hindu belief that their water would be defiled if it was touched by a Muslim. The misguided villagers were convinced that they had lost their dharm by using defiled water. So that is what dharm had been reduced to in medieval India. It had turned into something like the plant whose leaves shrink and droop at being touched. We call this plant Lajwanti (the

shy one). Its leaves contract if you just touch them, but they expand and firm up when you remove your hand. What a great pity that a mere plant revives as soon as the hand that touched it moves away, but the dharm of the Hamirpur villagers withered so irreversibly that it could never revive again. Their dharm was dead, and also gone for them forever were their Ram, their Krishn, and their God. The powers that they had taken as for ever now ceased to exist for them. That is how the ignorant villagers looked at the question. The truth is, however, that the power that was dead was only certain stupid customs which people had taken for dharm out of their spiritual ignorance. Dharm protects us and is, therefore, stronger than us. But whereas even the mortal body needs some kind of a weapon to be killed, the peculiar “dharm” of the gullible Hindu was destroyed by a mere touch. What kind of dharm was it, we wonder, for it is man-made customs which die, nor that which is eternal and immutable ?

That which is eternal is so strong and impregnable that arms cannot pierce it, fire cannot burn it, and water cannot wet it. Nothing that belongs to the material world can touch it, let alone food and drink.

Some such misguided traditions had prevailed at the time of Arjun, too, and he was obviously one of their victims. So he tearfully whines to Krishn about the eternal nature of family rites and customs. The war, he says, will destroy Sanatan Dharm, and when this is lost, all the members of the family are bound to end up in hell. It is evident that what Arjun is talking about is some customary beliefs of his time. That is why the spiritually adept Krishn refutes him and points out that the Self alone is perpetual. If we do not know the way to this embodied God, we are yet uninitiated into the spirit of Sanatan Dharm. Knowing that this immutable, eternal Self pervades all, what should we look for? This is what Krishn speaks of now:

25. “Knowing that the Self is unmanifest, a non-object to the senses, incomprehensible because he is a non-object to the mind, and changeless, (O Arjun), it does not befit you to grieve (over him).”

The Soul is unmanifest and not an object of the senses. He cannot be grasped by the senses. He is present even when there is the association of senses with their objects, but he cannot be comprehended. He is beyond thought. He is eternal and he is present even when the mind and its volitions persist, but he is beyond perception, enjoyment, and access. So the mind has to be restrained. Krishn has told Arjun that the unreal has no existence and neither is the real ever nonexistent. The Self is that reality. It is the Self that is changeless, constant, eternal, and unmanifest. They who know the essence have found the Self adorned with these traits. Not linguists nor the affluent, but only seers have known the unique character of the Self. In Chapter 18, Krishn will affirm that the Supreme Spirit alone is real. By restraining the mind, the worshipper sees him and becomes one with him. At the moment of attainment he realizes God and, the very next moment after this, he finds his own soul adorned with Godlike traits. He sees then that this Self is true, eternal, and perfect. This Self is beyond the reach of thought. Free from any deviation, it is called immutable. Krishn then uses simple logic to demonstrate the contradictions between Arjun's thoughts.

26. “You ought not to grieve, O the mighty-armed, even if you think of him (the Self) as ever-born and ever-dying.”

Arjun ought not to mourn even if he regards the Self as constantly born and constantly dying.

अव्यक्तोऽयमचिन्त्योऽयमविकार्योऽयमुच्यते ।
तस्मादेवं विदित्वैनं नानुशोचितुमर्हसि ॥२५॥
अथ चैनं नित्यजातं नित्यं वा मन्यसे मृतम् ।
तथापि त्वं महाबाहो नैवं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥२६॥

- 27. “Since this also proves the certain death of what is born and the certain birth of what dies, you ought not to grieve over the inevitable.”**

Even the assumption that the Self is ever-born and ever-dying only goes to establish that the born must die and the dead must be born. So Arjun ought not to grieve over what must be, for sorrowing over something which is inevitable is inviting yet another sorrow.

- 28. “Why grieve over the matter, O Bharat (Arjun), when all beings, disembodied before birth and disembodied after death, appear to possess a body only between the two events?”**

All beings are body-less before birth and also body-less after death. They can be seen neither before birth nor after death. It is only between birth and death that they assume the form of a body. So why grieve uselessly over this change? But who can see this Self? Krishn answers the question thus:

- 29. “Only a seer views the Soul as a marvel, another one describes him as a marvel, and yet another one hears him as marvel. While there are some who hear him and yet know him not.”**

Krishn has said before that only enlightened, realized, sages have viewed the Self. Now he elaborates the rareness of this vision. Only a rare sage sees the Self-views him directly rather than just hear of him. Similarly, another rare sage speaks of his

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।
तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थं न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥२७॥
अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत ।
अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव तत्र का परिदेवना ॥२८॥
आश्चर्यवत्पश्यति कश्चिदेनमाश्चर्यवद्ब्रूदति तथैव चान्यः ।
आश्चर्यवच्चैनमन्यः शृणोति श्रुत्वाप्येनं वेद न चैव कश्चित् ॥२९॥

substance. Only he who has seen the Self can describe him. Yet another rare seeker hears him as a wonder, for even hearing the voice of the Self is not possible for all because it is meant only for men of high spiritual attainment. There are people who hear the Self and yet know him not, because they are incapable of treading the spiritual path. A man may listen to, countless words of wisdom, split hairs, and be eager to acquire the highest wisdom. But his attachments are possessed of irresistible might and after only a short while he finds himself reversed to worldly business.

So at last Krishn gives his verdict:

30. “Since the Self dwelling in all bodies is unslayable, O Bharat, it does not befit you to grieve for living beings.”

Arjun ought not to mourn for living beings because the Self, in whatever body he is, can be neither slain nor pierced through. Duly expounded and treated with authority, the point at issue that “the Self is eternal” is concluded here.

But there arises another question at this point. How to realize and fulfil the Self? In the whole of the Geeta only two ways are suggested for this, first “the Way of Selfless Action” (Nishkam Karm Yog) and, secondly, “the Way of Discernment” (Gyan Yog). The required action for both the ways is the same. Stressing the necessity of this action, Yogeshwar Krishn says:

31. “In view of your own dharm, too, it is unworthy of you to fear, for there is nothing more propitious for a Kshatriya than a righteous war.”

It does not befit Arjun to be hesitant even if he just keeps his dharm in view, because there is no greater good for a Kshatriya

देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत ।
तस्मात्सर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥३०॥
स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि ।
धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत् क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥३१॥

than a war of piety. It has been repeatedly said that “the Self is immutable,” that “the Self is eternal,” and that “the Self is the only real dharm.” Now what is this dharm of the Self (swadharm)? The Self is the only dharm, although the capacity to engage in this dharm varies from individual to individual. This ability arising from one’s disposition has been named swadharm or the inherent dharm.

Ancient sages divided the travellers on the eternal path of the Self into four classes, Shudr, Vaishya, Kshatriy, and Brahmin, according to their innate abilities. In the primary stage of accomplishment every seeker is a Shudr, meaning one who is deficient in knowledge. He spends hours on worship and adoration of God, and yet fails to render even ten minutes of his time truly beneficial to his spiritual quest. He is unable to cut through the illusory facade of the material world. Sitting devoutly at the feet of a realized Sage, an accomplished teacher, at this stage helps in the cultivation of virtues in his nature. With this he is promoted to the level of a seeker of the Vaishya class. Gradually realizing that accomplishments of the Self are the only true accomplishments, he becomes adept in seizing and protecting his senses. Passion and wrath are fatal to the senses, whereas discrimination and renunciation protect them, but they are by themselves incapable of annihilating seeds of the material world. Gradually, then, as the worshipper progresses further, his heart and mind grow strong enough to carve their way through the three properties of nature. This is the inborn quality of a Kshatriy. At this point the worshipper acquires the ability to destroy the world of nature and its perversions. So this is the point of commencement of the war. By further refinement after this, the worshipper is slowly elevated to the category of a Brahmin. Some of the virtues that now grow in the seeker are control of the mind and senses, incessant contemplation, simplicity, perception, and knowledge. By slowly perfecting these qualities, then, he ultimately attains to God, and at this stage he ceases to be even a Brahmin.

At a sacrifice performed by Janak, King of Videh, answering questions by Ushast, Kahol, Aruni, Uddalak, and Gargi, Maharshi Yagnvalkya said that a Brahmin is one who has achieved direct realization of the Self. It is the Self, dwelling in this world and the higher world, and in all beings, that governs all from within. The Self is the inner ruler. The sun, the moon, the earth, water, ether, fire, stars, space, the sky, and every moment of time-are under the authority of this Self. This embodied Self, knowing and controlling the mind and the heart from within, is immortal. He is the imperishable reality (Akshar) and anything that is not Self is destroyed. In this world, he who offers oblations, performs sacrifices, practises austerities, even though for many thousands of years but without an awareness of this reality, gains little: all his offerings and exercises are perishable. He who departs from this life without knowing the imperishable is like a wretched miser. But he who dies with knowledge of reality is a Brahmin.¹⁰

Arjun is Kshatriy worshipper. According to Krishn there is no more beneficial way for such a seeker than war. The question is: what is meant by the term Kshatriy ? Usually, in social usage, it is taken as one of the terms such as Brahmin, Vaishya, and Shudr, which are denominations of “castes” determined by birth. These four constitute what are known as the fourfold varn. But that such was not the original intent behind the provision is evident from what the Geeta has to say about the inherent disposition of the Kshatriy. Here Krishn just demonstrates the duty of a Kshatriy. The problem, namely of what varn is and how a man of inferior varn can by his conduct gradually elevate himself to a higher class, is repeatedly taken up and resolved at the very end of the sacred composition.

Krishn says that he has created the four varn. Did he in doing so divide men into four classes? He himself says that it was not so: he has only divided action into four categories according to the innate property. So we have to see what that action is which

10. The Upanishad Brihadaranyak. [back](#)

has thus been divided. Properties are variable. The correct mode of worship can elevate one from the lowest property of ignorance to that of passion and moral blindness, and hence to virtue, or the quality of goodness. So through gradual cultivation of the inherent property, any individual can evolve himself into a Brahmin. He is, then, possessed of all the qualities that are essential to the attainment of and union with the Supreme Spirit.

Krishn lays down that even if the inherent ability, by which a man participates in this dharm, is of the unmeritorious and ignorant Shudr level, it is beneficial in the highest sense, because it is the starting point from where he can set out on the path of Self-cultivation. However, the worshipper is destroyed if he imitates the manner of higher classes. Arjun is a worshipper of the Kshatriy class. That is why Krishn enjoins him to remember his ability to wage war, because through it he will know that irresolution and grief are unworthy of him. There is no better task than this for a Kshatriy. Clarifying the point further, the Yogeshwar says:

32. “Blessed indeed, O Parth, are the Kshatriy who, without seeking, come upon such a war which is like an open door to heaven.”

The perfect marksman Arjun has made a chariot of the temporal body itself. Only the most fortunate among Kshatriy get an opportunity to fight in a war of righteousness that provides fighters with an open gateway to heaven. The worshipper of the Kshatriy class is strong enough to subdue all the three properties of matter. The door to heaven is open to him because he has stored an abundance of divine riches in his heart. He is qualified for the enjoyment of celestial existence. This is the open way to heaven. Only the fortunate among the Kshatriy, the ones who have the capacity to wage war, are able to know the significance of the incessant struggle that goes on between matter and spirit.

यदृच्छया चोपपन्नं स्वर्गद्वारमपावृतम् ।

सुखिनः क्षत्रियाः पार्थ लभन्ते युद्धमीदृशम् ॥३२॥

There are wars in the world. People assemble at a place and fight. But even victors in these wars fail to secure a lasting victory. These wars are, in fact, only acts of getting satisfaction by deliberately inflicting injury for injuries inflicted—mere acts of vengeance. The more a man suppresses others, the more he is eventually suppressed himself. What kind of victory is this in which there is only sense-withering grief? And at the end the body is also destroyed. The really beneficial war is the conflict between matter and spirit, for a single conquest in this war results in domination of matter by the Self. This is a conquest after which there is no possibility of defeat.

33. “And if you do not engage in this righteous war, you will lose the dharm of your Self and glory, and be guilty of sin.”

If Arjun does not fight in this war of matter and spirit, which will afford him access to the Supreme Spirit—to the immutable, eternal dharm, he will be deprived of his inherent capacity for action and struggle, and wallow in the mire of repeated birth and death, and of disgrace. Krishn then clarifies the nature of this disgrace:

34. “And all will for ever speak of your disgrace and such disgrace is worse than death itself for a man of honour.”

People will long speak ill of Arjun’s unmanliness. Even today sages like Vishwamitr, Parasher, Nimi, and Shringi are remembered chiefly for their transgressions of the path of righteousness. So worshippers reflect on their dharm. They think about what others will say of them. Such thought is helpful in the process of spiritual seeking. It provides the urge for persevering with the quest for the ultimate reality. It also provides support over a certain length of the spiritual way. Infamy is even worse than death for honourable men.

अथ चेत्त्वमिमं धर्म्यं संग्रामं न करिष्यसि ।
ततः स्वधर्मं कीर्तिं च हित्वा पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥३३॥
अकीर्तिं चापि भूतानि कथयिष्यन्ति तेऽव्ययाम् ।
सम्भावितस्य चाकीर्तिर्मरणादतिरिच्यते ॥३४॥

- 35. “Even the great warriors who have a high regard for you will then scorn you for having turned your back upon the war out of fear.”**

The mighty warriors, in whose esteem Arjun will then fall from honour to dishonour, will believe that he had retreated from the war due to cowardice. Who are these other great warriors? They, too, are seekers who make their way strenuously along the path of spiritual realization. The other formidable warriors who oppose them are, on the contrary, desire for sensual pleasure, anger, greed, and attachment, that drag the worshipper with equal tenacity towards ignorance. Arjun will be disgraced in the eyes of the very people who now hold him in high esteem as a worthy seeker. Apart from this,

- 36. “There can be nothing more painful for you than the disparaging and improper words your adversaries will speak against your valour.”**

His enemies will malign Arjun and utter words about him that should not be spoken. A single blemish is sufficient to bring upon one a shower of slander and abuse from all directions. Even words, improper for speech, are spoken. Can there be a greater grief than being an object of such calumny? So Krishn tells Arjun:

- 37. “Rise up with determination for the war because if you die in it you will attain to heaven and, if you win, you will attain to the most exalted glory.”**

If Arjun loses his life in the war, he will go to heaven and be

भयाद्रणादुपरतं मंस्यन्ते त्वां महारथाः ।
येषां च त्वं बहुमतो भूत्वा यास्यसि लाघवम् ॥ ३५ ॥
अवाच्यवादांश्च बहून् वदिष्यन्ति तवाहिताः ।
निन्दन्तस्तव सामर्थ्यं ततो दुःखतरं नुकिम् ॥ ३६ ॥
हतो व प्राप्स्यसि स्वर्गं जित्वा वा भोक्ष्यसे महीम् ।
तस्मादुतिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृतनिश्चयः ॥ ३७ ॥

with Swar - the indestructible God. The impulses that guide one towards the world of matter that is external to the Self will be retarded. And his heart will then overflow with the divine qualities that enable one to realize the Supreme Spirit. In case he wins, however, he will attain to the state of redemption, the noblest accomplishment. So Krishn exhorts Arjun to get up determinedly and prepare for war.

Usually by the verse under examination it is understood that if Arjun dies in the war, he will be privileged to live in heaven, but that if he is victorious he will be rewarded with enjoyment of worldly pleasures. But we cannot but remember that Arjun has told Krishn that, in neither a realm made up of all the three worlds, nor even in an Indr-like lordship over gods, can he see the means that can remedy the grief that is wearing out his senses. If he is to achieve only all this, he has said, he will not fight at any cost. Nevertheless, Krishn exhorts him to fight. What greater reward than domination over the earth in case of victory and celestial pleasures in case of defeat does Krishn promise Arjun in order to make him fight? Arjun is, in fact, a disciple aiming at the truth and excellence that lie beyond earthly and heavenly joys. Knowing this, Krishn, the accomplished teacher, tells him that even if the time allotted to his body expires in the course of the war and he does not succeed in reaching his goal, imbued with divine riches he will gain an existence in Swar, the changeless and eternal. If, on the other hand, he succeeds in the struggle while his temporal body is still alive, he will achieve the sublimity of God and thus attain to the state of the highest glory. He will thus be a winner both ways: if he conquers he will attain to the highest state; and if he loses he will find an abode in heaven and enjoy godly pleasures. There is profit in victory and there is profit too in defeat. The point is reiterated:

38. “You will not incur sin if you get up and fight the war, treating victory and defeat, profit and loss, and happiness and sorrow, alike.”

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभोलाभौ जयाजयौ ।
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥३८॥

Krishn counsels Arjun to regard with an equal mind happiness and sorrow, profit and loss, and victory and defeat, and prepare for war. If he participates in the war, he will not be guilty of sin. He will gain the state of sublimity, the most precious possession that is possible for a man to have, in case of success, and achievement of godhood even in case of defeat. So Arjun should deliberate well on his gains and losses, and prepare for war.

39. “This knowledge which I have imparted to you, O Parth, is related to Gyan Yog, the Way of knowledge, and now you should listen to me on Karm Yog, the Way of Selfless Action, with which you can successfully sever the fetters of action as well as its consequence (karm).”

Krishn tells Arjun that the knowledge, he has spoken of, is related to the Way of Knowledge. What knowledge is it except that Arjun should fight? The substance of the Way of Discrimination or Knowledge is only that if we fight according to our disposition after a careful appraisal of our capacity as well as of profit and loss, we shall attain to the state of ultimate bliss if we win, and to heavenly, godlike existence even if we are vanquished. There is gain in both cases. If we do not act, others will speak disparagingly of us and look upon us as having retreated like cowards, and we shall be disgraced. So to forge ahead on the path of action with a careful understanding of one's innate nature is itself the Way of Knowledge or Discernment.

We usually come across the misconception that no war needs to be fought on the Path of Knowledge. It is said that knowledge involves no action. We think in our vanity: “I am pure.” “I am enlightened.”- “I am a part of God himself.” Accepting it as an axiom that excellence begets excellence, we sit idly. But this is not the Way of Knowledge according to Yogeshwar Krishn. The “action” which has to be performed in following the Way of

एषा तेऽभिहिता सांख्ये बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु ।

बुद्ध्या युक्तो यथा पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि ॥३९॥

Knowledge is similar to that which has to be undertaken for the Way of Selfless Action. The only difference between the two ways is that of attitude. The man who treads the Path of Knowledge acts with a proper evaluation of his situation and with self-reliance, whereas the man who takes to the Path of Selfless Action also acts, but with reliance upon the mercy of the adored God. Action is a basic requirement of both the ways and in each of them it is the same, although it has to be done in two different ways. The attitudes behind the action in the two ways are different.

So Krishn asks Arjun to listen to him while he speaks of the Way of Selfless Action, armed with which he can effectively destroy the bonds of action and its consequence. Here the Yogeshwar has, for the first time, spoken of karm, although without explaining what it is. Instead of dwelling upon the nature of action, he describes its characteristic traits.

40. “Since selfless action neither wears out the seed from which it sprang nor has any adverse consequence, even a partial observance of this dharm liberates (one) from the dire terror (of repeated birth and death)”.

In the performance of action without coveting the fruits thereof, the initial impulse or the seed is not destroyed. It also does not give rise to any evil. So selfless action, even though done in small measures, frees us from the great fear represented by birth and death. That necessitates reflecting over the nature of such action and walking at least a few steps along its path. Worshippers who have renounced the vanity of earthly possessions have trodden this path, but so can those who lead the life of householders. Krishn tells Arjun to just sow the seed, for the seed is never destroyed. There is no power in nature, no

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥४०॥

weapon, which can destroy it. The material world can only cover it up momentarily and hide it for a while, but it cannot wipe out the initial inspiration, the seed, of the act of spiritual accomplishment.

According to Krishn, even the gravest of sinners can doubtlessly cross over by the ark of knowledge. He means exactly this when he says that if the seed of selfless action is just planted, it is imperishable. It does not even have any adverse outcome in so much as it does not abandon us midway after showing us how we can progress towards spiritual attainment. Even if we give it up, it works doggedly on for our final liberation. This is why selfless action, even in a small measure, provides freedom from the great dread of birth and death. Once planted, even after repeated birth, the seed of such action takes us to the realization of God and to emancipation alike from pleasure and from pain. The question is what we have to do if we choose the Way of Selfless Action.

41. “On this auspicious path, O Kurunandan (Arjun), the resolute mind is one, but the minds of the ignorant are divided and many.”

The mind which is earnestly and firmly oriented to selfless action is unified. Selfless action is only one and its outcome is also one. Spiritual accomplishment is the only true achievement, The gradual realization of this attainment by fighting against forces of the material world is an enterprise. This enterprise and resolute action, with a single goal are also one and the same. Then what about those who propagate more than one mode of action? In Krishn's view they are not true worshippers. The minds of such men are endlessly divided and that is why they conjure up endless ways.

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिरेकेह कुरुनन्दन ।

बहुशाखा ह्यनन्ताश्च बुद्धयोऽव्यवसायिनाम् ॥४१॥

42-43. “Desire-ridden men, O Parth, who are given only to listening to Vedic promises of rewards for action, who believe that the attainment of heaven is the highest goal of temporal birth and its activities, and who speak pretentious words to describe the many rites and ceremonies that they regard as conducive to the achievement of worldly pleasure and power, are ignorant and bereft of discernment.”

The minds of such men are riddled with endless dissensions. Covetous and attached to the tempting promises made by Vedic verses, they regard heaven as the most sublime goal and they believe in nothing beyond this. Such ignorant men not only devise numerous rites and ceremonies, the performance of which is expected to bring such rewards as the next birth, sensual enjoyment, and worldly dominion, but also flaunt them in flowery and affected language. To put it differently, the minds of men without discrimination have infinite divisions. They are addicted to precepts which promise fruits of action and accept the pledges of the Ved as final and authoritative. They regard heaven as the highest goal. Because their minds are split by many differences, they invent numerous modes of worship. They do speak of God, but behind the cover of his name they build up a whole multitude of ritual ceremonies. Now, are these activities not a form of action? Krishn denies that these activities are true action. What then is true action? The question remains unanswered at this point. For the time being Krishn only states that ignorant minds are divided minds, because of which they formulate an unlimited number of rites and ceremonies that are not real action. They not only expound them but also give utterance to them in figurative language. Let us now see the effect of all this.

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्यविपश्चितः ।
वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः ॥४२॥
कामात्मानः स्वर्गपरा जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम्
क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगौश्वर्यगतिं प्रति ॥४३॥

44. “Delighted by ornamental words and attached to worldly pleasures and dominance, men without discrimination have irresolute minds.”

Minds which are affected by the tempting words of such people are also corrupted and they also fail to accomplish what is worthwhile. The people whose minds are enamoured of such words, and who are attached to sensual enjoyment and temporal power, are deprived of their capacity for action; they are bereft of resolve for the true action that is a prerequisite of contemplation of the worshipped God.

But who are the people that lend their ears to these unwise men? Of course, rather than being knowers of the Self within and the Supreme Spirit without, they are the ones who are addicted to sensual pleasure and temporal power. The minds of such men are lacking in will for the action that is needed for the ultimate union of the Self with the Supreme Spirit.

What exactly is the meaning of the assertion that they, too, are mistaken who are blindly devoted to Vedic pronouncements? Krishn speaks about this:

45. “Since all the Ved, O Arjun, only illumine the three properties, you should rise above them, be free from the contradictions of happiness and sorrow, rest on that which is constant, and be unconcerned with getting what you do not have as well as with protecting what you have, in order to dedicate yourself to the Self within.”

The Ved only illumine the three properties of nature; they know nothing of what is beyond them. So Arjun should go beyond the sphere of action laid down by the Ved. How to do this? Krishn

भोगैश्वर्यप्रसक्तानां तयापहतचेतसाम् ।

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥४४॥

त्रैगुण्यविषया नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान् ।

निर्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान् ॥४५॥

advises Arjun to liberate himself from the conflicts of joy and sorrow, concentrate on the one changeless reality, and desire neither the unobtained nor the obtained; so that he may devote himself single-mindedly to the indwelling Self. This is how he can rise above the Ved. But is there any precedence of anyone going beyond them? Krishn says that as a man transcends the Ved, even so he comes face to face with the Supreme Spirit, and that the man who is aware of him is a true Vipri, a Brahmin.

46. “After the final absolution a man does not need the Ved, just as we do not need a pond when there is the all-stretching ocean (around).”

When a man is surrounded by the ocean on all sides, he has no use for a pond. Just so a Brahmin who has gained knowledge of the Supreme Spirit has no use for the Ved. That means that the one who knows God transcends the Ved, and that man is a Brahmin. So Krishn counsels Arjun to rise above the Ved and be a Brahmin.

Arjun is a Kshatriy and Krishn is exhorting him to be a Brahmin. Brahmin and Kshatriy are, among others, names of qualities that are inherent in the dispositions of different varn (or what are now more commonly known as castes). But the varn-tradition is originally, as we have already seen, action-oriented rather than a social provision determined by birth. What use has he for a petty pond who has availed himself of the crystal current of the Ganga? Some use a pond for ablution, while others wash their cattle in it. A sage who has known God by direct perception has the same kind of use for the Ved. They are undoubtedly useful. The Ved exists for stragglers who lag behind. Further elucidation of the problem begins from this point. Subsequently Krishn expounds the precautions to be observed in the performance of action.

यावानर्थं उदपाने सर्वतः संप्लुतोदके ।

तावन्सर्वेषु वेदेषु ब्राह्मणस्य ज्ञानतः ॥४६॥

47. “Since you are entitled only to the performance of action but never to the fruits thereof, you should neither desire rewards of action nor be drawn to inaction.”

Arjun, Krishn says, has the right to action but not to its results. So Arjun should persuade himself that fruits of action simply do not exist. He should not covet these fruits and neither should he grow disillusioned with action.

So far Krishn has first used the term “action” (karm: meaning both action and its consequence) in the thirty-ninth verse of the chapter, but he has not indicated what this karm is and how to perform it. He has, however, described its characteristic traits.

- (a) He has told Arjun that by the performance of action he will be freed from the bonds of action.
- (b) He has then said that the seed or initial impulse of action is indestructible. Once it is initiated, nature has no means to destroy it.
- (c) There is, Arjun has been told, not even the slightest flaw in this action, for it never abandons us while we are stranded amidst the temptations of celestial pleasures and worldly affluence.
- (d) Performance of this action, even in small proportions, can emancipate us from the great fear of birth and death.

But, as it is evident from the summary above, Krishn has not so far defined action. As for the way of doing it, he has said in the forty-first verse:

- (e) The mind which is resolved to do this action is only one and the way of doing it is also only one. Does it mean, then, that people engaged in other multifarious activities are not really engaged in the worship of God? According to Krishn, the activities of such people are not action.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥४७॥

Explaining why it is so, he adds that the minds of men without discernment are riven by endless divisions, because of which they tend to invent and elaborate an unlimited number of rites and ceremonies. So they are not true worshippers. They use pretentious and ornate language to describe these rites and ceremonies. So that man's mind is also poisoned who is lured by the charm of their words. The ordained action is, therefore, only one, although we have not yet been told what precisely it is.

In the forty-seventh verse Krishn has told Arjun that he has a right to action, but not to its fruits. So Arjun should not desire these fruits. At the same time he ought not to lose faith in the performance of action. In other words, he should be constantly and devotedly engaged in its performance. But Krishn has not yet said what this action is. The verse is usually interpreted as meaning: Do whatever you wish, only do not desire its fruits. That is, say those who interpret the verse thus, what selfless action is all about. In fact, however, Krishn has not so far told us what this action is that men are required to do. He has so far elaborated only its characteristics, what the gains from it are, and the precautions that have to be observed in the course of its performance. Yet the question of what exactly selfless action is has so far remained unanswered. It is, in fact, answered only in Chapters 3 and 4.

Krishn again reverts to what he has already said:

48. “The equipoise of mind that arises from profound absorption in the performance of action after renouncing attachment and being even-minded in respect of success and failure is, O Dhananjay (Arjun), given the name of yog.”

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ् त्यक्त्वा धनंजय ।

सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ ४८ ॥

Resting in yog, renouncing infatuation for worldly ties, and looking at success and failure with an equal mind, Arjun should undertake action. But what action? Krishn's pronouncement is that men should do selfless action. Equipose of mind is what is called yog. The mind in which there is no unevenness is full of equanimity. Greed destroys its evenness, attachments make it unequal, and desire for the fruits of action destroy its serenity. That is why there should be no hankering after the fruits of action. At the same time, however, there should also be no diminishing of faith in the performance of action. Renouncing attachment to all things, seen as well as unseen, and giving up all concern about achievement and non-achievement, we should only keep our eyes fixed on yog, the discipline that joins the individual Soul with the Supreme Spirit, and lead a life of strenuous action.

Yog is thus the state of culmination. But it is also the initial stage. At the outset our eyes should be fixed on the goal. It is for this reason that we should act keeping our eyes on yog. Equanimity of mind is also named yog. When the mind cannot be shaken by failure and success, and nothing can destroy its evenness, it is said to be in the state of yog. It cannot then be moved by passion. Such a state of mind enables the Soul to identify himself with God. This is another reason why this state is called Samattwa Yog, the discipline that makes the mind filled with equanimity. Since there is, in such a state of mind, complete renunciation of desire, it is also called the Way of Selfless Action (Nishkam Karm Yog). Since it requires us to perform action, it is also known as the way of Action (Karm Yog). Since it unites the Self with the Supreme Spirit, it is called yog. It is necessary to keep in mind that both success and failure should be viewed with equanimity, that there should be no sense of attachment, and that there is no desire for the rewards of action. It is thus that the Way of Selfless Action and the Way of Knowledge are the same:

49. “Take refuge in the way of equanimity (yog), Dhananjay, because action with desire for the fruits thereof is far inferior to the path of discrimination, and they are indeed paupers who are motivated by lust (for rewards).”

Covetous action is distant from and inferior to the Path of Discrimination. Those who yearn after praise are wretched men, vile and devoid of judgement. Arjun is, therefore, urged to find shelter in the even-minded Way of Knowledge. Even if the Soul is rewarded with what he desires, he will have to assume a body in order to enjoy it. So long as the process of coming and going, of birth and death, lasts, how can there be ultimate redemption? A seeker should not desire even absolution, for absolution is total freedom from passions. Thinking over the acquisition of rewards if he gets any, his worship is interrupted. Why should he now continue any further with the task of meditation on God? He goes astray. So yog should be observed with a perfectly even mind.

Krishn describes the Way of Knowledge (Gyan-Karm-Sanyas Yog) as also the Buddhi-or Sankhya Yog. He suggests to Arjun that he has attempted to enlighten him on the nature of “discrimination” in its relation to the Way of Knowledge. In truth, the only difference between the two is that of attitude. In the one, one has to proceed only after making a proper examination of the constructive and negative aspects of the undertaking, while in the other, too, equanimity has to be preserved. So it is also called the Way of Equanimity and Discrimination (Samattwa-Buddhi Yog). Because of this and because men possessed of desire for rewards are reduced to miserable wretchedness, Arjun is advised to find shelter in the Way of Knowledge.

दूरेण ह्यवरं कर्म बुद्धियोगाद्धनंजय ।
बुद्धौ शरणमन्विच्छ कृपणाः फलहेतवः ॥४९॥

50. “As the Soul endowed with a mind of equanimity renounces both meritorious and evil deeds in this world itself and the art of acting with equipoise is yog, the endeavour to master the way of equanimity of discrimination is Samattwa Yog.”

Stoic minds give up both the sacred and the sinful in this life itself. They adopt an attitude of detachment to both. So Arjun should strive for the equanimity of mind that is derived from the Way of Knowledge. Yog is the skill of acting with equipoise.

Two attitudes towards action prevail in the world. If people do a work, they also wish for its fruits. If there are no rewards, they may not even like to work. But Yogeshwar Krishn regards such action as bondage and states that worship of the one God is the only worthwhile action. In the present chapter he has only named action. Its definition is given in the ninth verse of Chapter 3; and its nature is dwelt upon at length in Chapter 4. In the verse about to be quoted, the skill of acting in freedom from worldly customs is that we should perform action and do it with dedication, but at the same time with voluntary renunciation of any right to its fruits. However, it is but natural to be curious about what will become of these fruits. But, of course, there is no doubt that selfless action is the right way of action. The whole energy of the desireless worshipper is then directed to his action. The human body is meant for worship of God. At the same time, though, one would like to know whether one has just always to go on acting or whether the performed action will also produce some result. Krishn now dwells upon this problem:

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।
तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥ ५० ॥

51. “Renouncing all desire for the fruits of their action and (thus) freed from the bondage of birth, wise men who are skilled in the way of equanimity and discrimination achieve the pure, immortal state.”

Wise men endowed with the yog of discrimination renounce the fruits arising from their action and are liberated from the bondage of birth and death. They achieve the pure, immortal state of oneness with God.

Application of intellect is categorized here into three kinds. Firstly by the way of discrimination (in verses 31-39). This yields two results : Divine riches and ultimate bliss. Secondly by the way of selfless Action (in verse 39-51) which produces only one consequence-liberation from the dire terror of repeated birth and death by attaining immaculate indestructible oneness with god. These are the only two ways described for the yog. The third type of application of intellect is done by the ignorants who are engaged in other endless modes of actions and who fall into the cycles of repeated birth and death according to their deeds.

Arjun's vision is limited only to acquisition of sovereignty over the three worlds and even over Gods. But even for the sake of these he is not inclined to war. At this point, Krishn reveals to him the truth that a man can attain to the immortal state through selfless action. The Way of Selfless Action also provides access to the state of being which death cannot break into. At what point, though, will a man be inclined to the performance of such action?

52. “At the time when your mind has successfully made its way across the swamp of attachment, you will be capable of the renunciation which is worth hearing of and which you have heard.”

कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ता हि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः ।
जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥ ५१ ॥
यदा ते मोहकलिलं बुद्धिर्व्यतितरिष्यति ।
तदा गन्तासि निर्वेदं श्रोतव्यस्य श्रुतस्य च ॥ ५२ ॥

The very moment Arjun's mind, indeed the mind of any worshipper, has steered safely across the marsh of attachment, and when it is completely free from yearning for either children or riches or honour, all its worldly ties are broken. It will then be receptive, not only to what is proper for hearing, but also to the idea of renunciation, making it an integral part of its action according to what it has learnt. At the present moment, however, Arjun is unprepared to listen to what is proper for hearing; and so the question of its influencing his conduct, of course, simply does not arise. Krishn again illumines the same worthiness:

53. "When your mind, now shaken by the conflicting precepts of the Ved, achieves a changeless and constant existence within the being of Supreme Spirit, you will then attain to immortal state through profound meditation."

When Arjun's mind, at present riven through and through by the contradictory teachings of the Ved,¹¹ achieves the state of steady contemplation of God, it will become changeless and constant, and then he will master the skill of even minded discrimination. He will then achieve the perfect equilibrium which is the ultimate state of immortality. This is the crowning point of yog. The Ved undoubtedly instruct us; but as Krishn points out, the contradictory injunctions of the Shruti confuse the mind. Precepts there are many, but it is unfortunate that people usually keep away from the knowledge that is fit for learning.

श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना ते यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला ।
समाधावचला बुद्धिस्तदा योगमवाप्स्यसि ॥ ५३ ॥

11. The first part of the Ved, known as "Works" (Shruti), the Ved known by revelation, and chiefly made up of hymns and instructions regarding sacred rites and ceremonies. The second part, known as "Knowledge" (Smriti), is made up of the Upanishad that are concerned with awareness of God, the highest aspect of sacred truth.^{back}

Arjun is told that he will reach the stage of immortality, the culmination of yog, when his agitated mind achieves constancy by meditation. This naturally whets Arjun's curiosity about the nature of sages who exist in an exalted state of perfect spiritual bliss, and whose minds are immovable and at peace in the state of abstract meditation. So he asks Krishn:

54. "Arjun said, 'what, O Keshav, is the mark of the man who has attained the state of true meditation and equanimity of mind, and how does this man with firm discrimination speak, sit, and walk ?'"

That Soul which has resolved his doubts is in the state of samadhi or perfect absorption of thought in the Supreme Spirit, the one worthy object of meditation. One who has achieved even-minded discrimination by identification with the eternal essence, which has neither a beginning nor an end, is said to be in the state of abstract contemplation of the nature of the Supreme Spirit. Arjun asks Krishn for the qualities of the man with a mind of equanimity engaged in such contemplation. How does a man with steadfast wisdom speak? How does he sit? What is his gait? Arjun has thus asked four questions. Thereupon Krishn says:

55. "The Lord said, 'A man is then said to be steadfast in mind when he has renounced all the desires of his mind and achieved contentment of the Self through the Self.'"

When a man has renounced all his desires and achieved his Soul's contentment through the contemplation of his Soul, he is said to be a man of firm discernment. This Self is apprehended only through complete abandonment of passion. The sage who has viewed the ineffable beauty of his Self and found perfect satisfaction in him is the man with a steady judgement.

अर्जुन उवाच: स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा समाधिस्थस्य केशव ।
स्थितधीः किं प्रभाषेत किमासीत ब्रजेत किम् ॥५४॥

श्रीभगवानुवाच: प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान् ।
आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥५५॥

56. “He is indeed a steady-minded sage who is unmoved by sorrow and indifferent to happiness, and who has overcome his passion, fear and anger.”

He whose mind is untroubled by bodily, accidental, and worldly sorrows, and who has rid himself of desire for physical pleasures, and whose passions, fear, and anger have been subdued, is the sage with discrimination who has achieved the culmination of spiritual discipline. Krishn then points out other qualities of this saintly man:

57. “That man has a steady mind who is entirely free from attachment and who neither gloats over success nor abhors failure.”

That man has a firm wisdom who is totally free from infatuation and who neither welcomes good fortune nor repudiates misfortune. That alone is auspicious which draws a Soul to the being of God, whereas that which pulls the mind to temptations of the material world is inauspicious. The man of discrimination is not too happy in favourable circumstances and he also does not scorn adversities, because neither is the object which is fit for attainment different from him nor is there for him any evil that may sully the purity of his mind. That is to say that he has now no need for further striving.

58. “As a turtle pulls in its limbs, this man reins in his senses from all objects, and then he truly has a steady mind.”

When a man pulls back his senses from all sides and restrains them within his mind like a turtle pulling its head and feet within its

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥५६॥
यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत्प्राय शुभाशुभम् ।
नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥५७॥
यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः ।
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥५८॥

shell, his mind is steady. But it is only an analogy. As soon as the turtle knows that the danger is gone, it again expands its limbs. Does a man of steadfast wisdom also, in the same way, let his senses loose after restraining them, and resume enjoyment of worldly pleasures?

59. “While objects of sensual pleasure cease to be for the man who withdraws his senses from them, his desire for these objects yet remains; but the desires of the man of discrimination are completely erased by his perception of God.”

The objects of sense come to an end for the man who has rejected them because his senses no longer perceive them, but his desires yet survive. The feeling of attachment lives on. But the passions of the yogi, the doer of selfless action, are annihilated by his perception of the ultimate essence that is God.

The accomplished, or enlightened, sage does not, like the turtle, re-extend his senses to objects which are pleasing to them. When once his senses have shrivelled, all the influences and impressions (sanskar) he has carried with him from a previous existence are irrevocably dead. His senses do not then return to life. By apprehending God through the observance of the Way of Selfless Action, even the attachments to objects of sensual pleasure become extinct. Force has often been a feature of meditation, and by its use seekers rid themselves of objects of sense. But thoughts of these objects persist. These attachments are brought to an end only with the perception of God and never before that, because before this stage residues of matter persist.

In this connection, my most revered teacher Shree Parmanand Ji used to cite an event from his own life. He had heard three voices from heaven when he was about to give up home. We respectfully asked him why these voices from heaven came to him alone; there had not been any for us. He replied that he, too, had

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।

रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥५९॥

the same doubt. But then he had an intuition that he had been an ascetic during his last seven births. During the first four of these he had only roamed about garbed in a holy man's paraphernalia, with a sandal paste mark on his forehead, ash rubbed on his body, and carrying the water pot used by ascetics. He had then lived in ignorance of yog. But during the last three births he had been a true saint, as such a Soul should be; and there was now the awakening of the way of yog in him. In the last life final liberation had been almost at hand and the end was in view, but a couple of his desires had remained. Although he had firmly controlled his outward body, there were these passions within him. That was why he had to go through yet another birth. And in this birth within a limited time God had freed him from all his passions, rendered him two resounding slaps as it were by providing him with all sights and sounds, and made him a true sadhu.

Krishn means precisely the same when he proclaims that although a man's association with objects of sense ends when he restrains them from reacting to these objects, he is rid of desire for these objects only when he knows his own Self as the identical God through meditation. So we have to act until we have achieved this perception. Goswami Tulsidas has also said that at first there are passions in the heart, which are swept away only by true devotion to God.

Krishn speaks about how difficult it is to withdraw the senses from their objects:

60-61. "O son of Kunti, men ought to subdue their senses which seize forcibly even wise and striving minds, and devote themselves to me with perfect concentration, because only that man's mind is unwavering who has achieved control of his senses."

यततो ह्यापि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः ।
इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः ॥ ६० ॥
तानि सर्वाणि संयम्य युक्त आसीत मत्परः ।
वशे हि यस्येन्द्रियाणि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ ६१ ॥

Mutinous senses ravish even discerning and active minds, and undo their steadiness. So with full control over his senses, equipped with yog and devotion, Arjun should find shelter in God, of whom Krishn is an incarnation, for that man alone has a firm mind who has subdued his senses. Here Yogeshwar Krishn explains what ought to be prevented in the course of worship, as also the components of spiritual seeking which it is the duty of men to undertake. Restraint and prohibition alone cannot subdue the senses. Along with negation of senses there must also be incessant contemplation of the desired God. In the absence of such reflection, the mind will be preoccupied with material objects, the evil consequence of which we see in the words of Krishn himself.

62. “They whose thoughts are of sensual objects are attached to them, attachment gives rise to desires, and anger is born when these desires are obstructed.”

The feeling of attachment still persists in men who have got over their concern with the objects of sense. Desire is born from attachment. And there is anger when there is an obstacle in the way of satisfaction of desire. And what does the feeling of anger give rise to ?

63. “Delusion is born from anger, by which memory is confused; confusion of memory undermines the faculty of discrimination and, when discrimination is lost, the seeker deviates from the means of absolution.”

Confusion and ignorance arise from anger. Distinction between the eternal and the transient is obliterated. Remembrance is shaken by delusion, as it happens with Arjun. Krishn says again that in such a state of mind one cannot determine wisely what to

ध्यायतो विषयान्पुंसः संगस्तेषूपजायते ।
संगात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥६२॥
क्रोधाद् भवाति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद्बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति ॥६३॥

do and what not to do. Confusion of memory weakens the seeker's dedication and loss of discrimination makes him deviate from his goal of being one with God.

Here Krishn has emphasized the importance of cultivating unconcern with sensual objects. The worshipper's mind should rather always be concerned with that-word, form, incarnation, or abode-by which his mind may be enabled to be one with God. The mind is drawn to sensual objects when the discipline of worship is relaxed. Thoughts of these objects produce attachment, which in its own turn results in desire for them. Anger is generated if the satisfaction of this desire is obstructed in any way. And ignorance finally undoes the power of discernment. The Way of Selfless Action is also said to be the Way of Knowledge, for it has always to be kept in view that desire must not be allowed to enter the worshipper's mind. There are, after all, no real fruits. Advent of desire is inimical to wisdom. Steady contemplation is, therefore, a necessity. A man who does not always think of God strays from the right path that will lead him to ultimate bliss and glory. However, there is one consolation. The chain of worship is only broken, not completely destroyed. Once the joy of worship has been experienced, when taken up again, it resumes from the same point at which it was discontinued.

'This is the fate of the worshipper who is attached to sensual objects. But what is the lot of the seeker who has mastered his mind and heart?

64. "But that man achieves spiritual tranquillity who has mastered his mind, and who remains unaffected by sense-objects although he may be roaming amidst them, because his senses are properly restrained."

रागद्वेषवियुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन् ।
आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥६४॥

Possessed of the means of spiritual realization, the sage who has experienced an intuitive perception of the identity of Self and the Supreme Spirit achieves the state of the most sublime peace, because he has subdued his senses, and therefore remained untouched by their objects even though he may be wandering in their midst. No prohibitions are needed for such a man. There is for him nothing unpropitious anywhere against which he should fight and defend himself. There is also for him no good for which he should yearn.

65. “After realizing the ultimate repose, all his (the seeker’s) sorrows disappear, and the blissful mind of such a man quickly grows in firmness.”

Blessed with a vision of God’s ineffable glory and his divine grace, all the worshipper’s griefs-the temporal world and its objects which are the abode of all sorrows-vanish and his power of discrimination grows strong and steady. Hereafter, Krishn dwells upon the lot of those who have not achieved the saintly condition:

66. “A man without spiritual accomplishment has no wisdom nor true faith, and a man without devotion knows no peace of mind. Since happiness depends on peace, how can such men be happy?”

A man who has not undertaken meditation is devoid of selfless action oriented wisdom. This impoverished man is even deficient in the feeling of devotion to the all-pervading Spirit. How can such a man, without an awareness of the Self within and the God without, be at peace? And how can he, without peace,

प्रसादे सर्वदुःखानां हानिरस्योपजयायते ।
प्रसन्नचेतसो ह्याशु बुद्धिः पर्यवतिष्ठते ॥६५॥
नास्ति बुद्धिरयुक्तस्य न चायुक्तस्य भावना ।
न चाभावयतः शान्तिरशान्तस्य कुतः सुखम् ॥६६॥

experience happiness? There can be no devotion without knowing the object of devotion and knowledge comes from contemplation. Without devotion there can be no peace and a man with a disturbed mind cannot experience happiness, much less the state of changeless, eternal bliss.

67. “For, as the wind captures the boat on water, just so even one of the senses, that roam amidst objects of their gratification and with which the intellect dwells, is strong enough to sweep away the discrimination of one who is unpossessed of spiritual attainment.”

As the wind drives a boat far away from its destination, even one out of the five senses roving amongst objects perceived by the intellect can get hold of the man who has not undertaken the task of spiritual quest and discipline. Therefore incessant remembrance of God is essential. Krishn again dwells upon the importance of action-oriented conduct.

68. “Therefore, O the mighty-armed (Arjun), the man who prevents his senses from straying to objects has a steady discrimination.”

The man who restricts his senses from being drawn to their objects is a man of steady wisdom. “Arm” is a measure of the sphere of action. God is called “mighty-armed” (mahabahu), although he is bodiless and works everywhere without hands and feet. The one who becomes one with him or is inclined to him and is on the way to his sublime splendour is also therefore, “mighty-armed.” That is the significance of the use of this epithet for both Krishn and Arjun.

इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते ।
तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नावमिवाम्भसि ॥६७॥
तस्माद्यस्य महाबाहो निगृहीतानि सर्वशः ।
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥६८॥

69. “The true worshipper (yogi) remains awake amidst what is night for all creatures, but the perishable and transient worldly pleasures amidst which all living creatures stay awake are like night for the sage who has perceived reality.”

The transcendental Spirit is like night for living beings because he can be neither seen nor comprehended by thought. So he is like night, but it is in this night that the spiritually conscious man remains awake because he has seen the formless and known the incomprehensible. The seeker finds access to God through control of senses, peace of mind, and meditation. That is why the perishable worldly pleasures for which living beings toil day after day is night for God's true worshipper.

The sage alone, who beholds the individual Self and the Universal Self and is indifferent to desire, succeeds in his enterprise of God-realization. So he dwells in the world and is yet untouched by it. Let us now see what Krishn has to say on the way in which this realized sage conducts himself.

70. “As the water of the many rivers falls into the full and ever constant ocean without affecting its tranquillity, even so the pleasures of sense merge into a man of steady discrimination without producing any deviation, and such a man attains the state of the most sublime peace rather than yearn for sensual enjoyment.”

The full and changeless ocean assimilates all the rivers that flow violently into it without losing its repose. Similarly the man who is aware of the oneness of his Self and the Supreme Spirit assimilates all worldly pleasures within himself without in any way straying from his chosen path. Rather than longing for sensual

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी ।

यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥६९॥

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति युद्धम् ।

तद्वत्कामं यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥७०॥

gratification, he aims at the achievement of the most sublime bliss of uniting his Self with the supreme God.

Ravaging everything that comes in their way-crops, men and animals, and their habitations-and with a frightening roar, the violently sweeping currents of hundreds of rivers fall into the ocean with a tremendous force but they can neither raise nor lower its level by even an inch; they only merge into the ocean. In the same violent way sensual pleasures assault the sage who has attained knowledge of reality and merge in him. They can impress on him neither weal nor woe. The actions of a worshipper are non good and non-evil; they transcend good and evil. The minds which are conscious of God, restrained and dissolved, bear only the mark of divine excellence. So how can any other impression be made on such a mind? In this one verse, thus, Krishn has answered several of Arjun's queries. Arjun was curious to learn the mark of a sage who knows the divine reality: how he speaks, how he sits, how he walks. With the single word-"ocean"-the omniscient Krishn answers all these questions. The mark of a sage is that he is like an ocean. Like an ocean he is not bound by rules, that he must sit like this and walk like that. It is men like him who achieve the ultimate peace, for they have self-control. They who yearn for pleasure can have no peace.

71. "The man who has renounced all desires, and who conducts himself without ego, arrogance, and attachment, is the one who achieves peace."

Men who have given up all desires, and whose actions are entirely free from the feelings of I and mine, realize the ultimate peace beyond which there is nothing to strive for and achieve.

विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान् पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥७१॥

72. “Such, O Arjun, is the steadfastness of the man who has realized God; after attaining this state he subdues all temptation and, resting firmly in his faith, with his death he continues in this state of rapture of the union of his Self with God.”

Such is the state of one who has realized God. Rivers of temporal objects merge into these ocean-like sages who are endowed with self control and an intuitive perception of God.

It is said by some that the Geeta is completed in the second chapter itself. But the chapter can be accepted as a conclusion only if all the implications of action (karm) get elucidated by a mere naming of the process. In this chapter Krishn has told Arjun to listen to him on the Way of Selfless Action, for by knowing it he will be liberated from the shackles of material life. He has the right only to act, but he has no right to the fruits of his action. At the same time he ought not to lose dedication to action. He must always be prepared to act. By the performance of such action he secures the most exalted knowledge of the Self and of God, and achieves ultimate peace. All this Krishn has said, but not what action is.

In fact, the section popularly known as “The Yog or Way of Discrimination” is not a chapter; it is but a contrivance of reviewers rather than a creation of the poet of the Geeta. There is nothing surprising in this, because we can at best interpret a work only according to our own understanding. In this “chapter”, as we have seen, by expounding the merits of action, and by indicating the precautions to be observed in the performance of action as well as the characteristic marks of the sage who has gained direct knowledge of the Self and God through perception, Krishn has aroused Arjun’s curiosity and also answered some of his queries. The Self is immutable and eternal. Arjun is exhorted to know it in order to learn reality. There are two ways of acquiring this

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य निमुह्यति ।

स्थित्वास्यामन्त-कालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥७२॥

knowledge, the Way of Discrimination or Knowledge and the Way of Selfless Action. Performance of the required action after a careful review of one's capacity and self-determination is the Way of Knowledge, whereas applying oneself to the same task with loving dependence on the worshipped God is the Way of Selfless Action, also known as the Way of Pious Devotion (Bhakti Marg). Goswami Tulsidas has portrayed the two ways, both leading to ultimate liberation, thus: "I have two sons. The elder son is a man of discrimination. But the younger one is a mere boy, devoted to me like a faithful servant and desirous only of rendering me service and homage. The latter thus relies on me, whereas the former depends upon his own prowess. Both of them have, however, to struggle and fight against the same enemies, namely, passion and anger.

Krishn says *in the same way* that he has two kinds of devotees. There is first the follower of the Way of Knowledge (gyanmargi). Secondly, there is the follower of the Way of Devotion (bhaktimargi). The man of devotion or doer of selfless action finds refuge in God and proceeds on his chosen path with total dependence on his grace. Possessed of confidence in his own strength, on the contrary, the man of discrimination goes along his way after making a proper evaluation of his own ability, as well as of the profit and loss in the enterprise. But the two have a common goal and the same enemies. Not only the man of discrimination, but also the man of devotion has to overcome the same adversaries, namely, anger, desire, and other impurities. Both of them have to renounce desire; and the action, too, that has to be performed under both the disciplines is one and the same.

**Thus concludes the Second Chapter, in the Upanishad of
the Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta, on the Knowledge of the
Supreme Spirit, the Science of Yog, and the Dialogue
between Krishn and Arjun, entitled:**

“Karm-Jigyasa,,” or “Curiosity About Action.”

**Thus concludes Swami Adgadanand’s exposition of the
Second Chapter of the Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta in
“Yatharth Geeta”.**

HARI OM TAT SAT